



Statement for the Record

**The Honorable Alejandro N. Mayorkas
Deputy Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security**

Before the

**United States Senate
Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee**

Regarding

**“Steps Taken by the Department of Homeland Security to Mitigate the Threat
to the Homeland from ISIS and Affiliated Terrorist Groups and our Response
in the Wake of the Brussels Terror Attacks”**

May 26, 2016

Chairman Johnson, Ranking Member Carper, and distinguished Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you to discuss priorities and key actions of the Department of Homeland Security to address terrorist threats to our Nation, particularly following the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant's (ISIL's) November 2015 and March 2016 terrorist attacks in Paris and Brussels.

The threats we face today are more complex and decentralized than they were a decade ago. As Secretary Johnson has said, we are in a new phase in the global terrorist threat. We have moved from a world of terrorist-directed attacks to a world that increasingly includes the threat of terrorist-inspired attacks, one in which the attacker may never have come face-to-face with a member of a terrorist organization who lives among us and radicalizes, inspired perhaps by the messages and propaganda ISIL disseminates through its use of social media. By their nature, such inspired attacks are harder for intelligence and law enforcement to detect and could occur with little or no notice, presenting a more complex security challenge.

Lone offenders who tend to have few contacts or outward indicators that allow for early identification pose the most likely threat of violence in the Homeland today. ISIL is actively trying to inspire such individuals. The group consistently releases high-quality English-language videos and magazines promoting its alleged caliphate and calling for supporters in the West to pursue attacks in their homelands. The group's supporters are also "doxing" individuals—gathering personal information through open source research and sometimes through hacking—and then publically disseminating the information and calling for attacks against these individuals. ISIL uses social media to publicly post this data, which has included names and addresses of U.S. military, law enforcement, and government personnel. Similarly, Al-Qa'ida is working to inspire potential followers in the West. Earlier this month the group's Yemen-based affiliate, al-Qa'ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), released its latest issue of *Inspire* magazine, which promotes "professional assassinations" in the United States and provides a range of bomb-making tips.

Working effectively with state, local, tribal, territorial, and private sector partners is the key to countering the threat from individuals who are inspired by foreign terrorist organizations. We define these individuals as "homegrown violent extremists." During the past two years, homegrown violent extremists have been inspired primarily by ISIL due to the group's robust English-language propaganda campaign, perceived military successes in Syria and Iraq and attacks in other countries, and the unique lure of the group's alleged caliphate. In 2014, the Federal Bureau of Investigation arrested approximately one dozen U.S.-based ISIL supporters. In 2015, that number increased to approximately five dozen. The majority of arrests were for attempting to travel overseas to join ISIL or for pursuing Homeland plotting on ISIL's behalf.

While homegrown violent extremists present the most likely terrorist threat today, we remain concerned about potential plots emanating from overseas. As the horrific attacks in Paris and Brussels made clear, Syria and Iraq-based ISIL members are involved in operations targeting Western nations. We continue to assess that complex, coordinated operations similar to ISIL's attacks in Paris and Brussels are more likely to occur in Western Europe than in the United States, due to the geographic proximity of Europe to Syria and Iraq and Europe's larger number

of returning foreign fighters. Nonetheless, the group's leadership wants to launch attacks in the home countries of its perceived Western adversaries.

Secretary Johnson focused our resources in four areas in order to counter the diverse and evolving terrorist threats we face:

1. Aviation security;
2. Border security;
3. Countering violent extremism; and,
4. Information sharing and support.

I will identify several of our initial initiatives in each of these priority areas.

Aviation Security

Securing commercial aviation and protecting the traveling public is a key priority of ours. The threats are diverse, including the attempt to smuggle explosives or weapons on board aircraft, ground-based attacks, and hijacking. We have strengthened our screening protocols at domestic airports to ensure that operatives or threatening objects do not enter the secure area of the airports. Transportation Security Administration's Peter Neffenger has implemented a robust security enhancement plan, including the more focused training of TSA personnel, the elimination of the managed inclusion program, and the deployment of additional canine teams.

After a December 2014 airport insider threat incident at Hartfield-Jackson-Atlanta airport, our Department asked the Aviation Security Advisory Committee to recommend adjustments to defend against aviation employees who might seek to bypass security to smuggle weapons or explosives into an airport's secure area. In response to the Committee's subsequent report, TSA is reducing the number of access points to airports' secure areas, coordinating with the FBI to conduct real-time recurrent criminal background checks of employees with secure area access, and encouraging airport employees to report suspicious activity.

Security enhancements also have been undertaken in foreign airports, particularly in airports that are last points of departure to the United States. Since July 2014 our Department has required enhanced screening at select overseas airports. The United Kingdom and other countries have followed suit with similar security enhancements, and the European Union recently passed legislation to enhance passenger screening. We continue to expand our aviation security training to foreign partners, sharing best practices and also loaning equipment to better ensure the effectiveness of passenger screening.

The sharing of information with international partners is a critical security measure to address the challenges that international travel presents. We have strengthened our sharing agreements and protocols with foreign partners and are continuing to work closely with law enforcement and intelligence community partners to screen for watchlisted terrorist subjects.

Our work continues. Earlier this year TSA directed a nationwide vulnerability assessment of airports, in collaboration with airport operators and stakeholders. These assessments were

completed last month and we are now further enhancing security with localized mitigation plans designed to address specific local vulnerabilities. This collaborative approach has been embraced by our stakeholders and is delivering enhanced airport security nationwide.

Border Security

In response to the threat posed by ISIL and other terrorist groups potentially trying to gain access to the Homeland, U.S. Customs and Border Protection is continually refining its risk-based strategy and layered approach to border security, extending our zone of security to interdict threats as far outward from the Homeland as possible to interdict threats before they ever reach the United States.

Operating at 328 official ports of entry across the Nation, CBP processes nearly one million travelers each day. Approximately, 30 percent of these travelers—more than 100 million per year—arrive via commercial aviation.

To mitigate the potential threat of foreign fighters who attempt to travel to and from Syria, CBP leverages all available advance passenger and manifest data, including Passenger Name Records, Advanced Passenger Information System data, previous entry information, intelligence, law enforcement information, and open source information, to detect foreign fighters and others who pose a potential threat to the United States. Equally important, CBP works in close partnership with carriers and its international counterparts to prevent passengers who may pose a security threat, or who are otherwise inadmissible, from boarding flights to the United States.

Another key part of CBP's efforts involves the screening of individuals traveling to the United States under the Visa Waiver Program. Over the last 18 months, DHS, in coordination with the Department of State and Congress, has initiated a series of changes to the Visa Waiver Program to strengthen its security and ensure that the program's requirements are commensurate with the growing threat from foreign fighters, especially those who are nationals of Visa Waiver Program countries.

In November 2014, CBP introduced additional data fields to the Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA) application that Visa Waiver Program travelers must complete before boarding a plane or ship to the United States. These enhancements have strengthened the security of the Visa Waiver Program.

On August 6, 2015, DHS introduced further security enhancements to the Visa Waiver Program, requiring member countries to enhance traveler vetting, data collection, and information sharing; use INTERPOL's Stolen and Lost Travel Document database; and, cooperate in the screening of refugees and asylum seekers. The August 2015 enhancements also introduced a requirement for all Visa Waiver Program travelers to use electronic passports (e-passports) for travel to the United States, improving our ability to verify the identity of the individual using the passport.

In December 2015, the Visa Waiver Program Improvement and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2015 codified many of these enhancements into law and established new travel and dual nationality restrictions for Visa Waiver Program applicants. As a result, DHS implemented new

ESTA questions regarding an individual's presence in Iran, Iraq, Sudan, Syria, and dual nationality with Iran, Iraq, Sudan, or Syria, to improve the security of the Visa Waiver Program and the protection of our borders.

Between the ports of entry, along our Southwest, Northern, and coastal borders, CBP extends our zone of security past our physical borders by using actionable information developed through integrated domestic and international partnerships. CBP works in collaboration with other DHS components and our interagency and international partners to monitor networks and patterns of illicit activity and to detect and effectively counter threats along and approaching our borders.

Countering Violent Extremism

Countering violent extremism is a critical component of the effort to counter the threat of homegrown violent extremists motivated by a variety of ideologies. In September 2015 our Department established the Office for Community Partnerships. Since its inception, the Office for Community Partnerships has worked to enhance existing relationships with communities across the country; build new relationships with the technology, marketing, and philanthropic sectors; and, find innovative ways to support those who are discouraging violent extremism.

Advancing countering violent extremism efforts also requires working in a unified and coordinated way across the U.S. Government. In January 2016, we established the countering violent extremism Task Force in partnership with other departments and agencies. Currently, our Department chairs and hosts this Task Force which includes a Deputy Director from the Department of Justice. The Task Force will synchronize and integrate whole-of-government countering violent extremism programs and activities, leverage new efforts, conduct ongoing strategic planning, and assess and evaluate other countering violent extremism programs and activities.

The Office for Community Partnerships and the Task Force are focused on working with stakeholders to prevent terrorist groups from radicalizing individuals to violence. Countering violent extremism stakeholders include federal, state, and local governments and law enforcement, civic and faith leaders, educators, social service organizations, mental health providers and the private sector. To achieve this, we are partnering with and empowering communities by providing them a wide range of resources to challenge violent extremism. Our efforts are a federally driven and locally implemented network of programs and resources aimed at applying tailored approaches to today's threats throughout the country.

Secretary Johnson has personally met with community members in 12 major cities across the country and intends to meet with many more. I have also personally met with community members in Boston and Minneapolis where, along with Los Angeles, the Department has worked with members of those communities to facilitate the development of countering violent extremism prevention frameworks.

To ensure that countering violent extremism efforts are adequately funded, the Office for Community Partnerships will soon send a formal notification to the public of an opportunity to

request part of the new appropriation of \$10 million in funding for developing local countering violent extremism efforts. Specifically, this funding will facilitate the development of programs and curricula for law enforcement, community organizations, educators, and others to help them prevent violent extremism of all kinds. Providing federal funding at this level on a competitive basis for the specific purpose of supporting local work to counter violent extremism represents the emphasis we place on these important efforts.

Information Sharing and Support

The rapid exchange of information and intelligence is critical to protecting the Homeland, and our efforts in this arena have come a long way since the September 11th attacks. Today, state and local law enforcement organizations instantly run suspect names against counterterrorism databases, and we have drastically shortened the time it takes to share information about incidents as they occur.

The Department is committed to sharing classified and unclassified information about recent events and threats as quickly as possible so that our state and local partners have the information needed to protect their communities. We are also incorporating the information we and our state and local partners collect every day, including law enforcement information, into our analysis and providing that information to the intelligence community. We do so while protecting privacy and civil liberties, by ensuring our information sharing agreements are subject to a comprehensive departmental-level governance framework that examines the recipient's authorities, approved usages, controlled access, audit features, dissemination limitations, and ultimately, retention or disposition requirements.

To advance these efforts, we are developing the DHS Data Framework, which provides a common information technology platform to improve our ability to use data to support multiple DHS missions. This program will alleviate the stove-piped information technology systems we currently deploy across our Department, enabling more controlled, effective, and efficient use and sharing of homeland security-related information across our Department and, as appropriate, the U.S. Government, all while protecting privacy.

Enhancing our information sharing and security partnerships extends beyond our borders. We view expanding partnerships abroad as key to our mission of securing the Homeland. Our Department is increasing counterterrorism information sharing with our international partners and is supporting the establishment of the European Counterterrorism Center by sharing best practices. We continue to work with our allies to vet fingerprints against our data holdings and those of other U.S. agencies to identify fraud or criminal or terrorist ties, and to rapidly share information with international partners after incidents occur.

The Department is working with the European Union and European Union-member states on information integration and sharing, investigations, border controls, and enhancing the European Union's ability to collect, analyze, and share Passenger Name Record data. On this note, we are pleased with the recently passed European Union directive regarding Passenger Name Record data.

Since the tragic attacks in Paris and Brussels, we have engaged closely with our French and Belgian partners to improve information sharing and to share many of the lessons that the United States has learned over the past decade. The threat to Europe extends beyond these two countries; European citizens from a number of countries have traveled to Iraq and Syria to join terrorist groups and learn terrorist tactics and techniques. As a result, we are working with a range of other European nations to sign additional information sharing agreements and improve border protection.

Conclusion

Chairman Johnson, Ranking Member Carper, and Members of the Committee, thank you again for allowing me the opportunity to appear before you today on the critical issue of Homeland security. I look forward to answering your questions.